DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 219 773 CS 207 106

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TITLE An Analysis of Police Attitudes toward Newspaper Reporters.
PUB DATE May 82
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (32nd, Boston, MA, May 2-5, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Measures; *Attitudes; *Credibility; Journalism; Law Enforcement; *Media Research; News Reporting; *Police; *Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *News Reporters

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine attitudes of police toward components of the law enforcement process and whether differences in rank, level of police enforcement, years of service to a police force, or familiarity with reporters made a difference in police attitudes toward newspaper reporters. Thirty-one officers completed a two-part questionnaire. Analysis of attitudes toward reporters was completed through the use of chi square statistics based on level of service, years on the force, rank, and familiarity with the reporters. There was a significant difference in attitude toward reporters based on level of service when controlling for newspaper subscriptions and for whether the officer had been interviewed by a reporter during the last year: officers at the state level had more positive attitudes toward reporters than did city and county police and presented evidence that working with reporters, reading newspapers, and knowing a reporter made a significant contribution to their attitudes. A Q-analysis of 54 responses to statements from popular literature about police and reporters divided the subjects into two groups. Type I subjects (most of whom were younger, local officers) viewed the newspaper as giving a distorted view of crime news and law enforcement officers, while Type II subjects (most of whom were older, state officers) recognized the societal value of crime news and thus urged cooperation despite problems in the newspapers' coverage of crime. (HTH)

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AN ANALYSIS OF POLICE ATTITUDES TOWARD NEWSPAPER REPORTERS

Submitted to:

Division III, Mass Communication
for Presentation
International Communication Association
32 Annual Conference

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In a highly differentiated society, the population looks to the mass media for information about those areas of social life that the citizen seldom, if ever, comes in direct contact with. The media then becomes the reference points for any problem that the population developes an interest in. One of the most consistent interest areas has been that of crime and the handling of crime by law enforcement personnel.

The United States, unlike most Western nations, does not have a police system. France and Belgium, for example, have highly centralized police systems with one office controlling police activities throughout their nations.[1] The so-called system in this country are mere collections of law enforcement units having some similarity of authority, organization and jurisdiction. They vary greatly in training, discipline, equipment, size, pay and operation. It may be accurate to say that no two law enforcement agencies are alike, even though their functions may be identically described.

The simplest way to classify law enforcement agencies has been according to the levels of government they report to--local, state and federal. But within these general classifications are numerous subdivisions based on the types of jurisdiction and/or type of police activity.

Information directed toward the public about police activity historically has stemmed primarily from the newspaper. It may be provided freely by the police but more likely it has been sought by members of the press. A murder or kidnapping rarely escape the American press and it is an accepted precept

that the newspapers have a right within legal limits to cover all news--including crime news.

Pick up any newspaper in the country and you will find that law enforcement is a regular part of the day's news. And, perhaps rightfully, it should be that way since one of the things generally accepted as making an area a good place in which to live is the effectiveness of the law enforcement.

Based on standardized newsroom maxims of: be fast, be brief and be accurate, the journalist hopes to carry back to the reader an account of what has happened in the last twenty-four hours. He does it in a manner that can "be trusted" for it relies upon what the reader, you or others he trusts, like an official source, saw and heard.[2] This would suggest that the reporter continuously talks to law enforcement people or checks police records to provide the daily crime story.[3] It certainly should necessitate a good working relationship between the reporter and the law enforcement officer although evidence found in the popular literature points to a lack of rapport and natural antagonism.

When a policeman doesn't like reporters, it is usually because: (a) The police think reporters are procriminal.[4] (b) The media publishes allegations against the police without giving the police a chance to present their side. (c) Accusations of police wrongdoing, especially alleged police brutality, often receive widespread publicity. (d) Journalists seem to have no ethics. They look at confidential documents and betray confidences. (e) Journalists often interfere--in various ways--with what is going on at the scene of an accident or a crime. (f) Media sensationalize events playing up particular kinds of incidents.[5]

Niderhoffer found that police departments are extremely sensitive to

the press, perceiving it as something of a measure of public opinion. Because police are involved whenever there is some emergency, crime or unusual event of public significance, their activities receive a "major" share of press attention which they feel is often biased.

This apparent bias leads to defensiveness as shown in a study that reported 95 percent of the younger group of patrolmen said, "Newspapers in general seem to enjoy giving an unfavorable slant to news concerning the police, and prominently play up police misdeeds rather than virtues." In addition, roughly three-fourths of the sample's 220 police officers were in agreement.[6]

The matter of news angles constantly perplex police. They are often surprised to find a story which they considered to have little or no news value "blown into page one spreads." Likewise, stories that police frequently feel are important are often buried deep inside the paper because of what editors and reporters call news values.[7]

In his travels about the nation, Marx found that the tendency of many police officers, both administrators and the rank and file, is to spread their hands at the inaccurate stories and pictures appearing in the press and on radio and television and ask, "Why do they treat us this way?"[8]

Many groups have sought to explain the operation of the media in relationship to crime news[9] and police officials have sought to assign a cause for the criticism they see heaped upon themselves.[10] The police officer may, in argument to himself, say he did not create and cannot resolve the social conditions that stimulate crime; the police do not start and cannot stop the convulsive social changes that are taking place in America; the police do not enact the laws that they are required to enforce, nor do they dispose of the

criminals they arrest; the police are only one part of the criminal justice system; the criminal justice system is only one part of the Government; and the Government is only one part of Society. Why then do the media show the police in such a negative light?

The law enforcement officer may thus attribute the reasons for negative coverage or negative personal attitudes[11] on someone else by inferring other's motivation.[12]

There is already a good deal of emirical data to suggest that policemen have attitudes and personality characteristics that are distinctively different from other occupational groups and it is reasonable to assume that such predispositions will be important determinants of the manner in which police carry out their duties. Westley, Guthrie, Watson and Bayley and Mendelsohn have all reported the police to be generally homogenous in their attitudes and beliefs on topics of law enforcemnt, the courts and the law, youth and minorities and the public.[13]

Bayley and Mendelsohn, for example, reported that 89 percent of police officers feel that police work is more important than other jobs. Negative attitudes by police toward correctional agencies, probation officers, and juvenile court judges have been reported by Piliavin and Briar.[14] Goldman[15] and Reiss[16] have found police to be generally critical of the public because of their lack of cooperation or interest in effective law enforcement.

A number of studies have been devoted to the "police personality." Police personnel have been reported to be suspicious,[16] cynical,[17] isolated from personal friends and the public,[18] and suffering from feelings of powerlessness and self-hate.[19] But contrary to popular belief, police scores on authoritarism and dogmatism are similar to those obtained by groups of

comparable education.[20]

The literature has consistently pointed to the conservative political orientation of police officers. They have been described as conservative and moralistic typically approaching problem solving in an either-or, black and white manner.

Research Questions

Although some research has measured the relationship of two concepts (police and judges, police and the public) none of the studies reviewed attempted to observe and measure the psychological meaning of the five common components or concepts that can be tied to the law enforcement operation: Me (the individual officer who completes the testing instrument), the law enforcement officer, the judge, the public and the newspaper reporter who describes and reports the process for the public.[21] The present study thus attempts to determine attitudes of police toward these components of the law enforcement process.

As a result, the study asked: Is there a difference in attitude toward the five law enforcement concepts? From previous studies, it was expected that there would be two groups of concepts: "Me" and "law enforcement" (similar because it would reflect the individual and his orientation to career) and "judges," "public" and "reporter."

A second research question was: Do differences in rank, level of police enforcement or years of service to a police force make a difference in the attitude that the subjects have about reporters. It was expected that those persons who had been removed from the actual day-to-day law enforcement activities would tend to have more favorable attitudes towards reporters. This was also the assumption for rank since rank generally is associated with

completion of a specified number of years of service with acceptable levels of job performance.

A third research question was: Does familiarity with newspaper reporters make a difference in the attitudes toward reporters. It was expected that although the popular literature suggests law enforcement personnel as a whole have negative attitudes toward reporters, that those who actually had worked with a reporter or knew a reporter on a first name basis would have a different attitude toward the reporter concept.

And finally: What are the differences or similarities in police attitudes toward the newspaper and its reporters.

Method

A group of 31 law enforcement officers was selected to participate in this study. All were current members of the 1980 class of the National Traffic Management Institute, held regulation duties within the three differing levels of law enforcement (local city police, county and state officers) and represented a diverse section of mid America. All the officers were asked to complete a two part instrument during early April of 1980. The first part of the instrument was a set of semantic differential scales of the nature developed by Osgood, Suci and Tarnenbaum.[22]

The 12 bi-polar combinations used in the study were all selected from the evaluative dimension.[23] The scales are educated-ignorant, candid-deceitful, useful-useless, harmonious-dissonant, successful-unsuccessful, important-unimportant, progressive-regressive, believing-skeptical, wise-foolish, good-bad, optimistic-pessimistic and grateful-ungrateful.

Using the data obtained from the semantic differential scales on the five concepts of the law enforcement process (Me, judges, public, reporter,

police), an analysis of variance was completed to determine if there were differences in the responses. In addition, Tukey's procedure was applied to the mean scores for each of the concepts to isolate the significant variations in responses.

An analysis of the attitude toward the reporter was completed through the use of chi square statistics based on level of service (status), years of service (yrserv), rank on a police force (rank) and familiarity with the reporter (measured by subscription to newspaper, having been interviewed during the past year, and subjects knowledge of a reporter on a first name basis).

The second part of the instrument was a Q-sort of 54 statements taken from popular literature concerning the reporter and the police officer. Using Q-methodology, an effort was made to identify types or clusters of law enforcement personnel based on their agreement or lack of agreement concerning the statements.

Results

The analysis of variance (df = 4 and 26 at the .05 level) indicated a significant difference (F = 4.778) between the concepts under observation. Tukey's honestly significant difference for all multiple comparisons at the .05 level revealed that there was a difference in concepts me (5.49) and judges (4.22); me (5.49) and reporters (4.13); judges (4.22) and officers (5.66); reporters (4.13) and officer (5.66); and officer (5.66) and the public (4.60). [TABLE 1]

This suggests that the subjects found their attitudes toward themselves compatible with those of the career area that they had chosen and confirmed the hypothesis that there was a difference in the officer and the other

components of the law enforcement process.

However, there was no significant difference in me (5.49) and public (4.60); reporters (4.13) and public (4.60); judges (4.22) and reporters (4.13); and judges (4.22) and public (4.60). Thus the police attitude is significantly different from those who make the laws, those who evaluate compliance with the law and those who report the passage or adjudication of the law.

An analysis of the attitude toward the reporter was completed through the use of chi square statistics based on level of service (status), years of service (yrserv), rank on a police force (rank) and familiarity with the reporter (measured by subscription to newspaper, having been interviewed during the past year and subjects knowledge of a reporter on a first name basis).

When considering rank of officers, there was no significant difference in attitudes toward reporter. This was also the case when considering years of service. It thus seemed that attitudes were consistent over time and that those who have just joined the force have similar attitudes as those who have been law enforcement officers for twenty or more years. Those joining the force may simply comply with the existing negative attitudes toward reporters which is consistent throughout the various years of service.

However, there was a significant difference in reporter attitude based on level of service when subscription to newspaper was controlled for (.0037); level of service when controlling for the officer being interviewed during the past year (.04); and level of service when controlling for officers being on a first name basis with a reporter (.004). In all cases the difference occurred on the state level and separates state officials from city and county officials. Although they (city and county) might be expected to come in more direct contact with reporters, state officials had more positive attitudes and presented evidence that working with reporters, reading newspapers, and

knowing a reporter made a significant contribution to their attitudes. This seems to suggest that familiarity breeds acceptance of the reporter.[TABLES 2,3,4] However, it does not confirm our second research question that rank or years of service effect favorably the attitudes that law enforcement officers have toward reporters.

Although 31 subjects originally had been selected for the study three subjects were not used in the Q-analysis because of a lack of statistically significant correlations with any of the other subjects in the sample. After removing these three subjects, two groups of police appeared based on their attitudes: Type I suggested that subjects viewed the newspaper as giving a distorted view of crime news and the law enforcement officer while Type I. recognized the societal value of crime news and thus urged cooperation despite problems in the newspaper's coverage of crime.

Type I

Of subjects (N=19) that compose Type I membership, 47 percent were younger officers (one to six years of service) drawn from the local area. Their higher positive factor loadings could be characterized as 1) the newspaper crime news story portrays the police officer in an unfavorable manner [Police are frustrated Wyatt Earps (1.723) portayed as using too much force (1.440) or portrayed as villians (1.49)] and 2) the reporter does not show a true picture of crime [the reporter does not wait for details (1.786), he prints inaccurate rumors (1.131) and the reporter thinds that the police withhold information especially if police may be involved in the crime (1.13)].

Type I's lower negative factor loadings generally concern newspaper coverage fairness. This police group suggest that the paper does not take sides in reporting crime news (-1.463), that papers do not report impartially whether or not the news concerns the police (-1.500), that the paper's re-

porters do not provide facts on behind the scenes events in an unbiased manner (-1.695) and that police do not receive real cooperation in their treatment by the newspaper (-1.886). [TABLE 5]

Thus in the Type I subject's view, the newspaper gives a distorted view of crime events, portrays the law enforcement officers as excessive in their efforts and neither the paper or its reporters adequately cooperate with the police.

Type II

Type II subjects (N=9) generally composed the state law enforcement officers from the mid to upper range of service (10 to 18 or 20 to 25 years). Their higher positive factor loadings can be placed into three categories 1) there is an importance in the public being knowledgable about criminal events [Papers should print the full truth (1.868), the papers should fight and discourage crime (1.686), it is important for the people to be informed (1.049) but that the newspaper and its reporters should not have the right to invade private lives to keep the public informed (1.040)] 2) the law enforcement officer should attempt to cooperate with reporters because the reporter is only doing his job [when information is leaked, police should seek cooperation in withholding the story (2.567), police should not lie to evade questions (1.227)] and 3) the media sometimes does not understand police activity [stories imply police use extra force that is not needed (1.028) and reporters think that there is a withholding of information if police are involved in the crime (1.606)].

Lower negative factor loadings concerned the value of coverage and co-operation that the newspaper and reporter provides: 1) although crime news does not glamorize the criminal it does not serve as a deterrent (-1.063) nor is crime news coverage feared by those who commit crimes (-1.164),

similarly it does not really spotlight crime and provide needed clues for the law enforcement officer (-1.662) and 2) papers are also less than impartial in their coverage [reporters are unbiased in their coverage (-1.511). they agree to withhold stories (-1.560) and they seek to help police in any way possible (-1.703)]. [TABLE 6]

Seemingly, Type II subjects see the newspaper as potentially serving a vital societal role that the police should cooperate with. But, the law enforcement officer in this type does not believe that the newspaper provides "crime fighters" with the assistance that the newspaper claimes to provide in helping the law enforcement officer.

Discussion

Among the two types found in the Q-Analysis, there was concensus that newspapers should print the full truth about crime news (1.416) and thus fight and discourage crime (1.354) but that stories really do not do a good job in presenting information about crime. For example, both groups agreed that thepress does not do a good job in not taking sides (-1.386) and that reporters are unbiased (-1.603). These responses cut across geographic areas of the country where the subjects perform their duties and also across various duties associated with various ranks. In addition, these responses did not seem to really change with knowledge of reporters or personal contact with reporters. It is true, however, that members of Type II were regular newspaper readers, generally reported having been interviewed at least once during the past year and tended to report that they had been interviewed at least once a month about some current investigation. [TABLE 7]

In addition there was agreement that the newspaper or newspaper reporter fails to cooperate with the police. For example, both groups said that

papers do not give leads to police (-1.288), and do not decline to publish facts of a case to aid in police investigations (-1.230). Perhaps reporter activity in crime news is because of lack of knowledge. The groups indicated that the reporters often failed to select proper sources for their stories (-1.264) and generally did not treat crime news with good taste (-1.481).

A review of non-consensus items suggests that the major differences between the two types is in the kind of discontent that the law enforcement officers displayed. [TABLE 8]

Type I subjects thought the reporters pictured the law enforcement officer in an unflattering and untruthful manner. They contended that not only does the newspaper present an image of the "stupid cop" but it also tends to glamorize crime by their coverage of crime. This would serve as a basis for their lack of willingness to work with or seek help from members of the print media.

However, Type II subjects reported that while the newspapers may not always show the policeman in the "most favorable light" or provide the type of real cooperation that the law enforcement officer would seek to have, the reporter, in general, does attempt to establish a reputation for fairness in his work. It is this attempt at fairness and Type II subjects belief in the societal value of newspapers that prompts the law enforcement officer to be willing to work with print medium representatives.

Certainly, this confirms the popular literature's frequent discussion of antagonism or antagonistic attitudes by representatives of the law enforcement profession toward reporters. Further research into this area, perhaps through a co-orientation approach of police and reporters might add a significant dimension to the present findings.

FOOTNOTES

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TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance of Attitudes Toward Concepts

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F
Between Groups Variance	4	63.217	15.804	4.78
Within Groups Variance	26	85.986	3.307	
TOTAL	30			

TABLE 2

Contingency Table for Attitude by Status Controlling for Subscribe to Paper

Reporter Attitude	STATUS			
	Community	County	State	
Low	2	3	1	6
	7.4%	11.1%	3.7%	22.2%
Average	4	0	2	6
	14.8%	0.0%	7.4%	22.2%
High	4	0	11	15
	14.8%	0.0%	40.7%	55.6%
	10	3	14	27
	37.0%	11.1%	51.9%	100.0%

Chi Square = 15.54428 with 4 degrees of freedom

Significance = .0037

TABLE 3

Contingency Table for Attitude by Status Controlling for Being Interviewed

Reporter Attitude	STATUS			
	Community	County	State	
Low	1 3.7%	2 7.4%	2 7.4%	5 18.5%
Average	4 14.8%	0 0.0%	3 11.1%	7 25.9%
High	2 7.4%	1 3.7%	12 44.4%	15 55.6%
	7 25.9%	3 11.1%	17 63.0%	27 100.0%

Chi Square = 9.97598 with 4 degrees of freedom

Significance = .0408

TABLE 4

Contingency Table for Attitude by status Controlling for First Name Basis

Reporter Attitude	STATUS			
	Community	County	State	
	1	3	1	5
Low	4.2%	12.5%	4.2%	20.8
Average	4	0	3	7
	16.7%	0.0%	12.5%	29.2%
High	3	0	9	12
	12.5%	0.0%	37.5%	50.0%
	8	3	13	24
	33.3%	12.5%	54.2%	100.0%

Chi Square = 15.31154 with 4 degrees of freedom

Significance = .0041

TABLE 5

Z Scores for Law Enforcement Officer Type I

		Z-Scores
34.	When a crime interests a reporter he is frequently so impatient to get the story that he will not wait for all the facts.	1.786
60.	For the most part reporters assume that all policemen are frustrated Wyatt Earps who delight in locking up people, bashing in their brains or shooting them.	1.723
38.	Reporters delight in telling stories about police that do not do a good job or violates his oath of office.	1.564
41.	Police are often portrayed as villians in crime news.	1.499
23.	Crime reporting frequently implies that the police use more force than they need to in carrying out their duties.	1.440
42.	The police are often shown in the media with the unfortunate stereotype of the "stupid cop."	1.362
58.	The newspaper does not present a true picture of what is going on in our nation's streets.	1.338
36.	Reporters think that there is going to be a "clamping down" of information if a policeman is involved in a criminal act.	1.139
12.	Reporters frequently print inaccurate rumors as though they were established facts in their crime news coverage.	1.131
53.	The newspaper should fight and discourage crime.	1.033
27.	When you get to know the newspaper reporter you find the newspaper is a very efficient and smoothly operated organization.	-1.026
3.	The press does a good job of not taking sides in reporting crime news.	-1.463
15.	The average crime story shows the average policeman as dedicated to high ideals of police service.	-1.467
6.	The press treats crime news with restraint and good taste.	-1.474
25.	Newspapers just report the news impartially whether or not it concerns the police or crime.	-1.500
8.	Newspaper reporters provide facts about what is going on behind the scenes in an unbiased manner.	-1.695
22.	The newspaper generally selects proper sources for information based on quality of information they offer.	-1.730
26.	Police receive real cooperation and are treated fairly by the newspaper personnel.	-1.886

TABLE 6

Z Scores for Law Enforcement Officer Type II

		Z-Score
1.	When information has leaked out that might damage a case, it is advisable for the policeman to seek the newspaperperson's cooperation to withhold the story.	2.567
45.	It is better to provide a "no comment" if there is truth to a reporter's "tip," if it may hurt the case, rather than to deny it.	2.112
50.	The newspaper should print the truth and the full truth about crime in a city.	1.868
53.	The newspaper should fight and discourage crime.	1.686
36.	Reporters think that there is going to be a "clamping down" of information if a policeman is involved in a criminal act.	1.606
31.	Most reporters on the police beat try to establish a reputation for fairness and hold on to it.	1.227
44.	Police should never lie to evade answering a reporter's question that is based either on information or on a rumor the reporter is trying to check out.	1.131
11.	It is important that the public keep informed of the public affairs (crime, etc.) in the city where it lives.	1.049
51.	The newspaper should not have the privilege of invading the private rights of an individual even if he has been involved in a crime.	1.040
23.	Crime reporting frequently implies that the police use more force than they need to in carrying out their duties.	1.028
54.	Crime news tends to glamorize criminals and to make others fall into a life of crime.	-1.050
46.	Crime news is an important deterrent to crime because, either directly or indirectly, it carries the warning that crime does not pay.	-1.063
49.	Crime news provides a penalty for many offenders that is more feared than the penalties of the law.	-1.164
60.	For the most part reporters assume that all policemen are frustrated Wyatt Earps who delight in locking up people, bashing in their brains or shooting them.	-1.199
25.	Newspapers just report the news impartially whether or not it concersn the police or crime.	-1.272

TABLE 6 (Continued)

Z Scores for Law Enforcement Officer Type II

		Z-Scores
6.	The press treats crime news with restraint and good taste.	-1.489
8.	Newspaper reporters provide facts about what is going on behind the scenes in an unbiased manner.	-1.511
13.	Newspapers often decline to publish established facts in a crime case for fear of adding to the problems of the police.	-1.560
2.	Newspapers frequently develop stories that turn the "spotlight" of publicity on crime and thus give leads to the police.	-1.662
29.	The newspaper and its reporters do not try to nab the criminal, but seek to make it easier for the police to do their jobs.	-1.703

TABLE 7

Consensus Z Scores for Law Enforcement Officers

		Z-Scores
50.	The newspaper should print the truth and the full truth about crime in a city.	1.416
36.	Reporters think that there is going to be a "clamping down" of information if a policeman is involved in a criminal act.	1.373
53.	The newspaper should fight and discourage crime.	1.354
23.	Crime reporting frequently implies that the police use more force than they need to in carrying out their duties.	1.234
3.	The press does a good job of not taking sides in reporting crime news.	-1.131
13.	Newspapers often decline to publish established facts in a crime case for fear of adding to the problems of the police.	-1.230
22.	The newspaper generally selects proper sources for information based on quality of information they offer.	-1.264
2.	Newspapers frequently develop stories that turn the "spotlight" of publicity on crime and thus give leads to the police.	-1.288
29.	The newspaper and its reporters do not try to nab the criminal, but seek to make it easier for the police to do their jobs.	-1.306
25.	Newspapers just report the news impartially whether or not it concerns the police or crime.	-1.386
6.	The press treats crime news with restraint and good taste.	-1.481
8.	Newspaper reporters provide facts about what is going on behind the scenes in an unbiased manner.	-1.603